

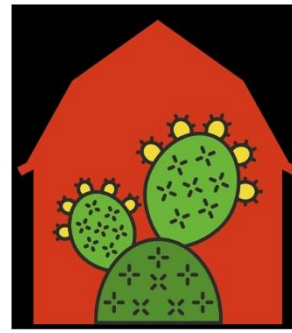
CONNECT AND LEARN!

Be sure to utilize all the resources
and tools available on our website at:

www.PricklyEds.com

- Connect on Social Media
Facebook & Instagram
@PricklyEdsCactusPatch
- Sign up to receive our free monthly
educational newsletter
- Look for our monthly “Life in the
Garden” columns in East Bay Life

***Visit us during the growing
season for wicked
awesome plants. You will
find us on Barneyville Road
at the border of Barrington
and Swansea. Opening for
the season April 30, 2025!***



**Prickly Ed's
Cactus Patch
Native Plant
Emporium**



WELCOME! Tonight's session is part of
the “Yards Alive” Living Landscapes
Learning Series organized by Prickly
Ed's Cactus Patch Native Plant
Emporium.

Less Lawn - More Garden - More Life!

CREATING MAGICAL OUTDOOR SPACES

Where Kids Can Thrive
with Cindy Larson Moura

WED. APR. 9 @ 6:30 PM

Collis Family Gallery



YARDS ALIVE!
LIVING LANDSCAPES
LEARNING SERIES
PRICKLY ED'S CACTUS PATCH 2025



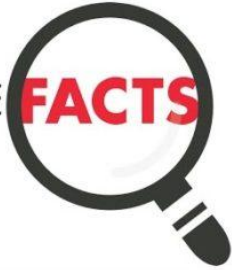
PRICKLY ED'S
CACTUS PATCH



Barrington
PUBLIC LIBRARY

The session will focus on four interconnected parts of the topic

JUST THE **FACTS**




Child Development Basics – What Children Need

Nature Basics – What Nature Needs (and why this matters for children)

Current State of Affairs for Children and Nature and the Connection Between the Two

How Our Backyards Hold a Cure for What's Ailing Both Kids and Nature



Some guiding principles

Spaces that are good for kids can also be great for nature.

Spaces that are good for nature can also be great for kids.

Kids need more space to experience nature, and nature needs more space to thrive.

You can provide more space for both of these things right outside your door!

THINK OF ONE OF YOUR
VERY FAVORITE OUTDOOR
PLACES TO BE AS A CHILD.
TAKE IN ALL OF THE DETAILS.

- What do you see?
- How did it make you feel?
- What did you like to do?



**Children learn primarily through engaging with
and exploring their environment.**



**Human Brain
at Birth**



**Human Brain
6 years old**

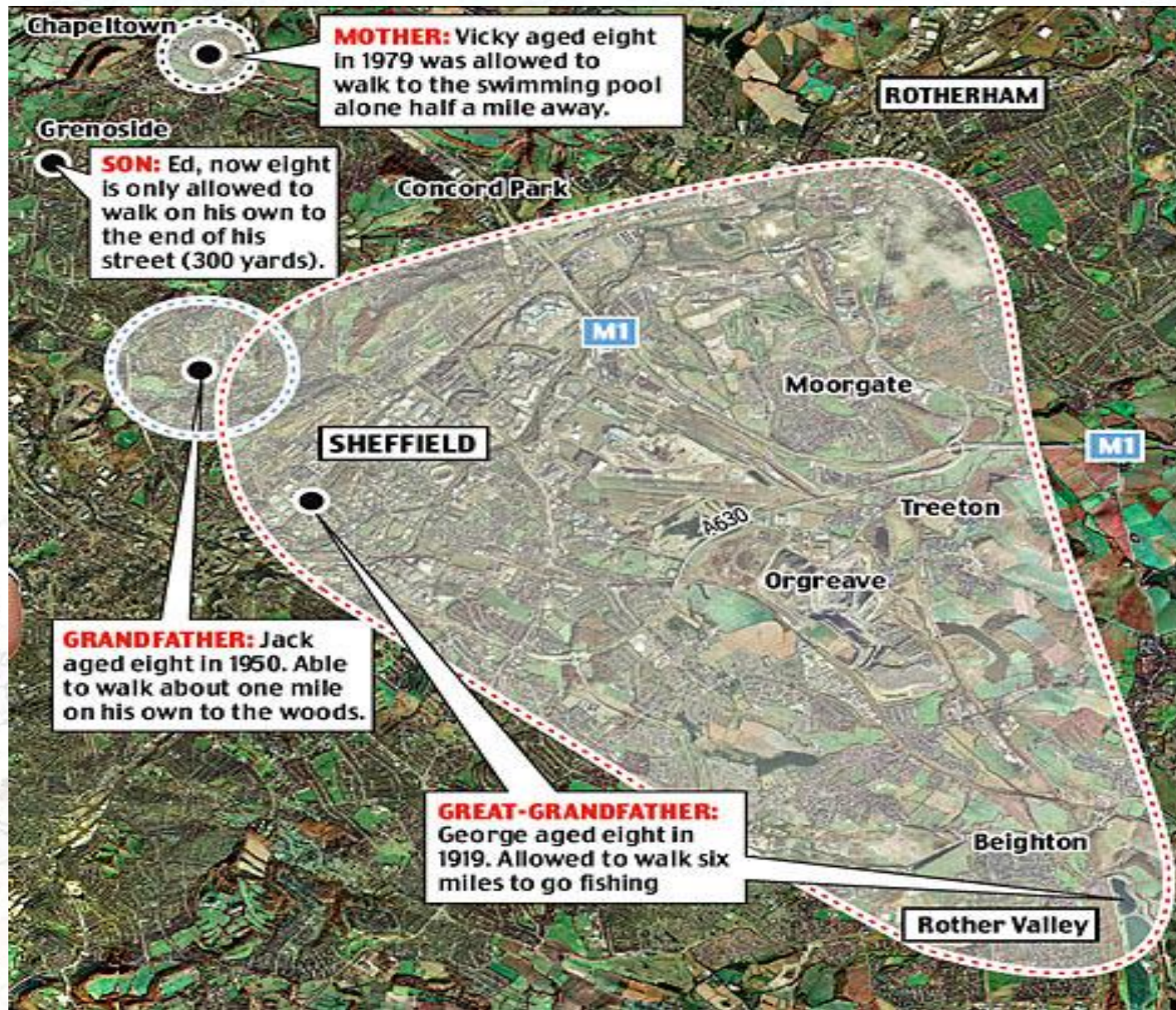


**Human Brain
14 years old**



What Do You
Consider an
“Outdoor
Playspace”?





Today's children spend less time outdoors than any prior generation.

On average, children today:

- Spend less than 10 minutes a day engaging in unstructured outdoor play
- Spend up to 7 hours per day in front of some sort of electronic screen



Unstructured Outdoor Play Is Essential to Healthy Development!

Unstructured play is when children engage in activities of their own choosing, without adult guidance or predetermined goals, allowing for spontaneous exploration and creativity.



Unstructured Outdoor Play

- Fosters creativity
- Spurs imagination
- Enhances problem-solving, decision-making, and social skills.
- Leads to better health overall
- Reduces stress
- Provides vital connections to nature

Children who spend a lot of time outside, especially in nature:

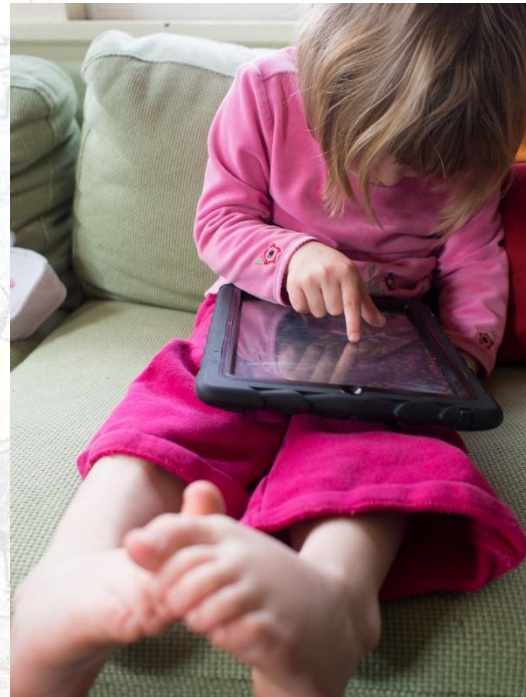


This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

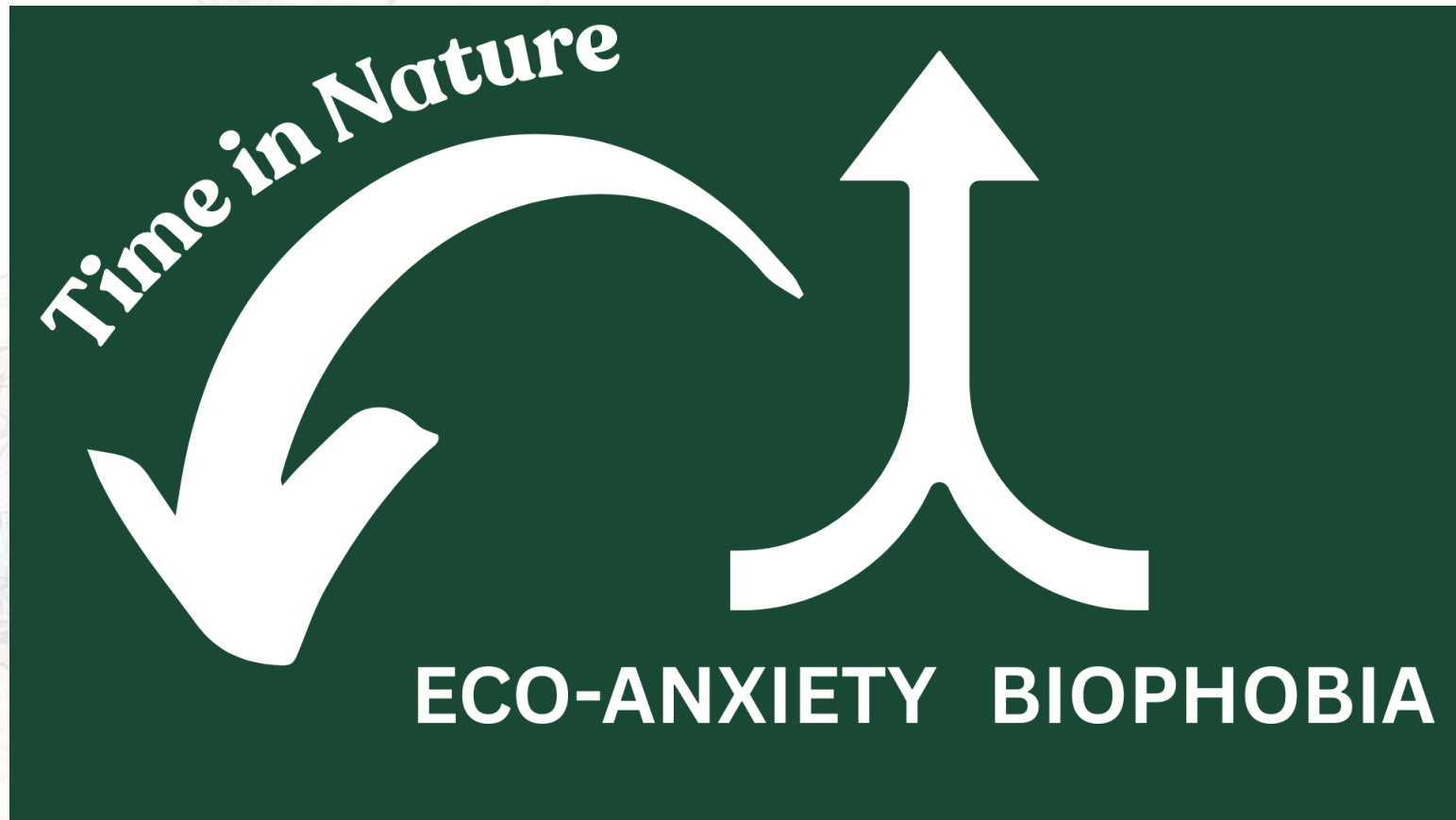
- Are more resilient
- Sleep better
- Care more about nature
- Move more
- Develop more creativity
- Learn responsibility
- Are less stressed
- Are more confident

Conversely, too much screen time:

- *Impedes overall cognitive functioning*
- *Impairs social:emotional development*
- *Raises risk of obesity*
- *Leads to problems with attention, anxiety, and depression*
- *Impacts sleep rhythms.*



While time in nature has decreased, anxiety about the environment has increased as has an unnatural fear of natural things (“biophobia”)



There is remarkable agreement that this is a problem.

- 80% of adults surveyed said they do not believe that children spend enough time outdoors/in nature, 50% believed this was an extremely serious issue.

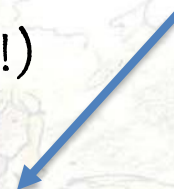


So, this all leads us to the main reasons that children do not spend more time outdoors despite the evidence of how important it is...

1. SCREENS

2. FEAR!

Hold on to this thought – we will come back to it (a lot!)



“Maybe it’s because of our detachment from nature, the sensationalizing of rare events, or our innate suspicion of the natural world that once threatened us, but our ability to accurately assess risk in the U.S. has gone haywire.” *Doug Tallamy*

This disconnect between children and nature isn't only hurting children – it is hurting nature too!

"Passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young; it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart.

If we are going to save environmentalism and the environment, we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature."

— Richard Louv, [Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder](#)

Photo by Sara Horvet



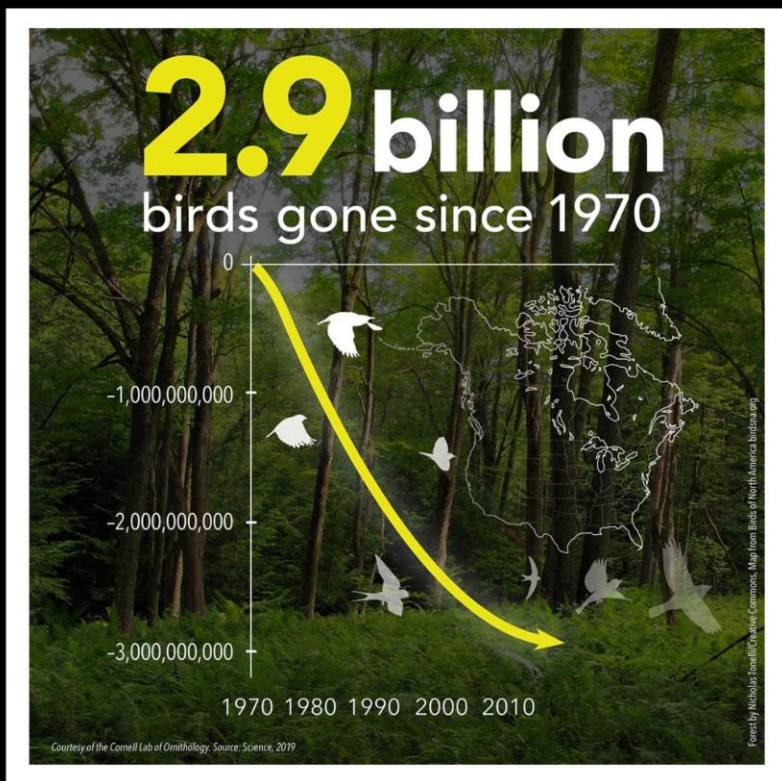
The Pollinator Buzz

- Estimated **45% decline** in all invertebrates (75% for flying insects) worldwide over the last 40 years
- Nearly **1/3 of all insects are endangered**, even iconic pollinators like the Monarch Butterfly and American Bumblebee
- As much as **\$577 billion** of global food production requires pollinators
- **85% of all flowering plants** on earth need help with pollination



**Pollinators are an indicator species.
Their presence or absence is linked
to broader ecosystem health.**





North America has lost nearly 3 billion birds since 1970. Here in Rhode Island a recent survey found equally grim results. More than 1/3 of birds are in serious decline.

A staggering loss that suggests the very fabric of North America's ecosystem is unraveling.”

— Cornell Lab director John Fitzpatrick and study coauthor Peter Marra

In the words of E.O. Wilson, “Biodiversity is our most valuable but least appreciated resource”



High Biodiversity
9 animals & 7 and plants

vs.



Low Biodiversity
3 animals & 3 plants

Biodiversity, the variety of life on earth, is declining faster than at any other time in human history. Biodiversity is essential to our wellbeing.

What does this have to do with the topic at hand?

>93% of land in RI & MA is privately owned.

- **By landscaping differently individuals have a remarkable opportunity to invite life back to their property.**

- **If many residents work together, connected corridors of habitat are formed and resiliency and biodiversity begin to rebound in communities.**

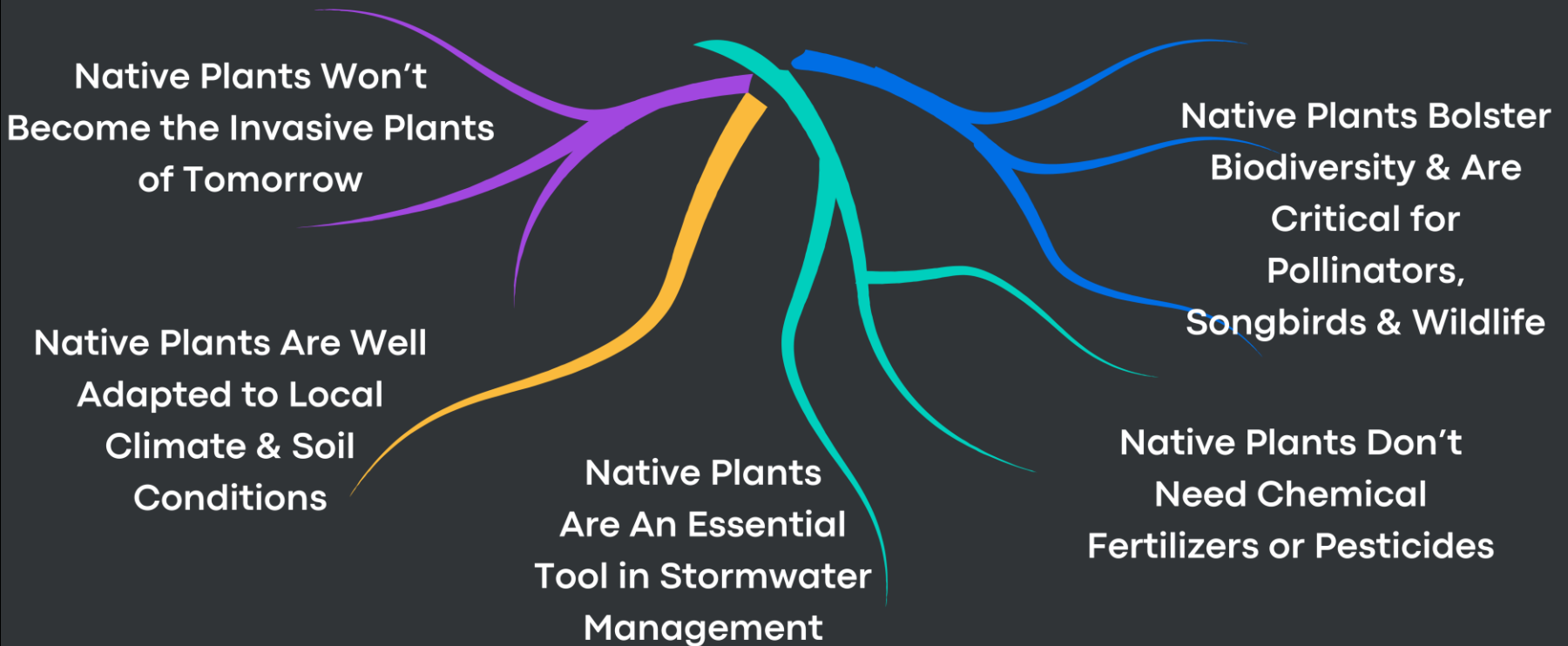
- **At the same time, these spaces can provide the very vibrant infrastructure needed to support unstructured play and connections to nature for children - right at home!**





Prime ecological benefits are achieved when the plants you use are native plants.

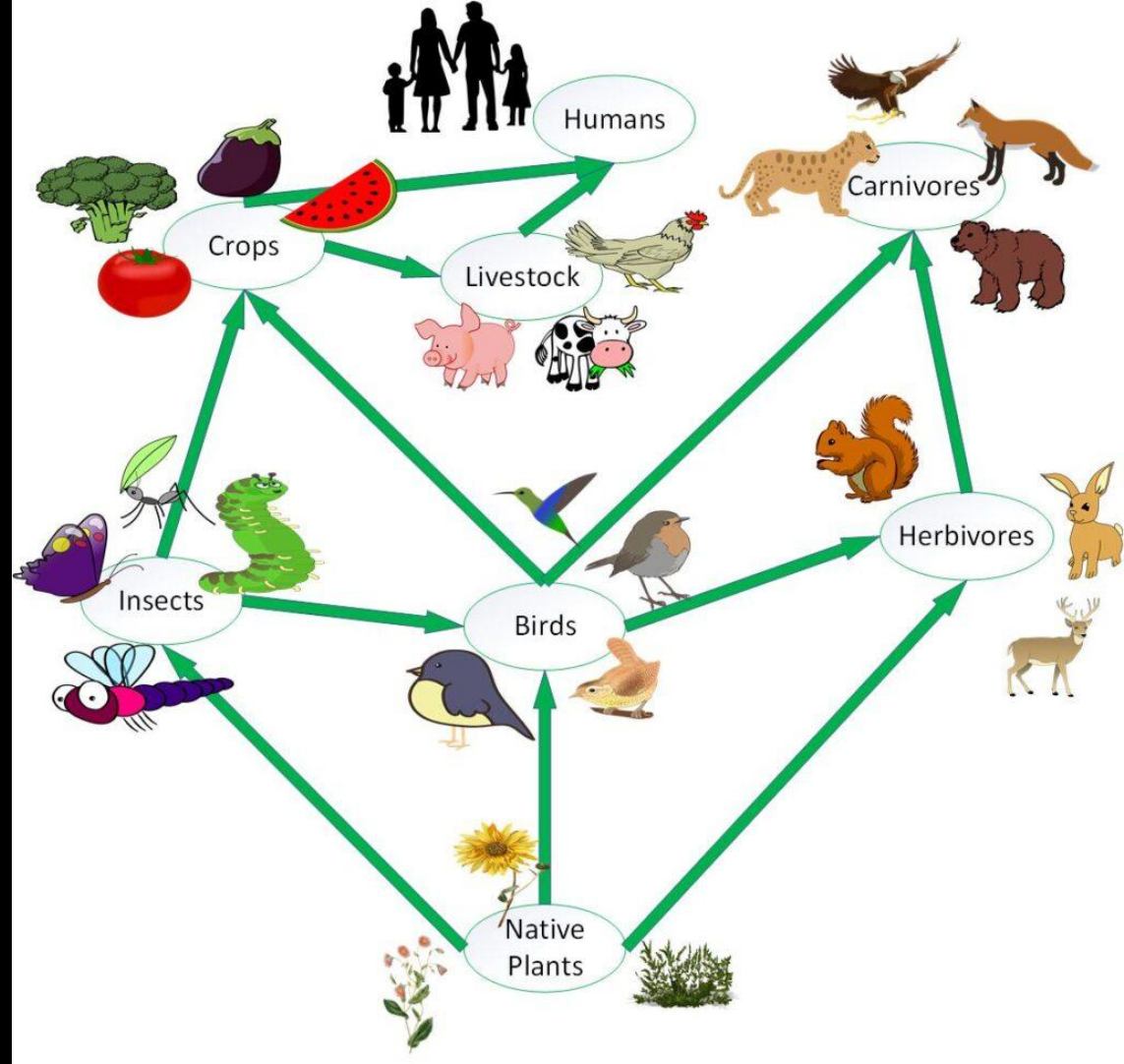
Native Plants Are At The Root Of Resilient Gardening



Native Plants Restore a Missing Sense of Place

Native Plants form the foundation of vibrant food webs that support biodiversity.

It is not the presence of non-native plants that is the issue, it is the absence of native plants!



Douglas Tallamy

"Chances are you never thought of your garden--indeed, all of your property--as a wildlife preserve that presents the last chance we have for sustaining plants and animals that were once common throughout the U.S. But that is exactly the role our suburban landscapes are playing."

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME



AND – what if
in the process
of creating
habitat at
home you
could also
create the
backdrop to
begin creating
room for
unstructured
outdoor play?



Your family can work together to create a National Wildlife Federation Certified Habitat at Home!

BUILD A CERTIFIED HABITAT AT HOME!



<https://blogs.nwf.org/Native-Plant-Habitats/Create-and-Certify/At-Play/Kids-and-Families-Garden-for-Wildlife>



Habitat Exploration at Home

**NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION**

**Certified Wildlife Habitat®**

Habitat Essentials Checklist Worksheet

**Note: this checklist is only a tool to prepare your garden, please certify online at www.nwf.org/certifiedwildlife/habitat*

Use this walk-through checklist to confirm you have all the elements necessary to be certified. Note that your property may already have naturally-occurring habitat elements that count towards certification. Meanwhile, other features may be things that you can manually add to your garden to increase resources for wildlife. Some garden features may even meet more than one of the habitat essential requirements!

Please also be aware of any local ordinances or restrictions on what you can or cannot have in your garden and take care to follow them.

Native Plants

Native plants are the foundation of a wildlife habitat garden. They provide ample sources of food, cover and places to raise young. National Wildlife Federation recommends a habitat garden space strive for 70% native plants. As you prepare your garden for certification, consider how you can add more native plants to your space to provide the required habitat elements listed below.

Food

Your habitat needs to provide a minimum of **three** natural food sources for wildlife.

<input type="checkbox"/> Native plants	<input type="checkbox"/> Seeds	<input type="checkbox"/> Host Plants for Caterpillars
<input type="checkbox"/> Nectar and Pollen	<input type="checkbox"/> Nuts/Cones	<input type="checkbox"/> Foliage/Twigs
<input type="checkbox"/> Fallen Leaf Layer	<input type="checkbox"/> Berries/Fruits	<input type="checkbox"/> Insects

If you would like to supplement the natural food sources listed above for wildlife with a bird feeder, be sure to regularly clean and disinfect it.

Water

Your habitat needs **one** of the following to provide clean water for wildlife to drink and bathe. If an existing water source is visible from and adjacent to your property, that can count for this requirement.

<input type="checkbox"/> Bird Bath	<input type="checkbox"/> Butterfly Puddling Area	<input type="checkbox"/> Lake
<input type="checkbox"/> Seasonal Pond	<input type="checkbox"/> Rain or Water Garden	<input type="checkbox"/> River or Stream
<input type="checkbox"/> Year-Round Pond	<input type="checkbox"/> Spring	<input type="checkbox"/> Ocean

Cover

Your habitat needs at least **two** places for wildlife to find shelter from the weather and predators.

<input type="checkbox"/> Mature Trees	<input type="checkbox"/> Evergreens	<input type="checkbox"/> Pond or Water Garden
<input type="checkbox"/> Bramble Patch	<input type="checkbox"/> Brush or Log Pile	<input type="checkbox"/> Animal Burrow
<input type="checkbox"/> Groundcover	<input type="checkbox"/> Dense Shrubs/Thicket	<input type="checkbox"/> Leaving dead perennial stems 12-18 inches for overwintering insects
<input type="checkbox"/> Rock Pile or Wall	<input type="checkbox"/> Meadow or Prairie	

If you would like to supplement natural cover sources listed above for wildlife with a roosting box, be sure to regularly clean and disinfect it.

Use the checklist like a scavenger hunt 

Pollinator Gardens and Kids Are a Great Combination!

Planning your garden – think like a pollinator.

Go Native. Pollinators are "best" adapted to local, native plants, which often need less water than ornamentals.

Bee Bountiful. Plant big patches of each plant species for better foraging efficiency.

Bee Showy. Flowers should bloom in your garden throughout the growing season. Plant willow, violet, and mayapple for spring and aster, joe-pye weed and goldenrod for fall flowers.

Bee Patient. It takes time for native plants to grow and for pollinators to find your garden, especially if you live far from wild lands.

Bee Gentle. Most bees will avoid stinging and use that behavior only in self-defense. Male bees do not sting.

Bee Chemical Free. Pesticides and herbicides kill pollinators.

Bee Sunny. Provide areas with sunny, bare soil that's dry and well-drained, preferably with south-facing slopes.

Bee Homey. Make small piles of branches to attract butterflies and moths. Provide hollow twigs, rotten logs with wood-boring beetle holes and bunchgrasses and leave stumps; old rodent burrows, and fallen plant material for nesting bees. Leave dead or dying trees for woodpeckers.

Bee a little messy. Most of our native bee species (70%) nest underground so avoid using weed cloth or heavy mulch.


Bee Aware. Observe pollinators when you walk outside in nature. Notice which flowers attract bumble bees or solitary bees, and which attract butterflies.

Bee Friendly. Create pollinator-friendly gardens both at home, at schools and in public parks. Help people learn more about pollinators and native plants.

Bee Diverse. Plant a diversity of flowering species with abundant pollen and nectar and specific plants for feeding butterfly and moth caterpillars.

<https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/index.shtml>



A map of New England, including parts of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. The map is densely populated with small, circular icons of purple butterflies, representing pollinator habitats. Major cities and towns are labeled, including Lake George, Glens Falls, Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, Amsterdam, Schenectady, Latham, Albany, North Adams, Pittsfield, Northampton, Springfield, Worcester, Framingham, Salem, Boston, Provincetown, Yarmouth, Nantucket, Taunton, New Bedford, and Weymouth. The map also shows major highways and bodies of water.

All across the
area people are
joining the
“Pollinator
Pathway” to help
create connected
corridors of
habitat. This is a
great family
activity!

www.Pollinator-Pathway.org

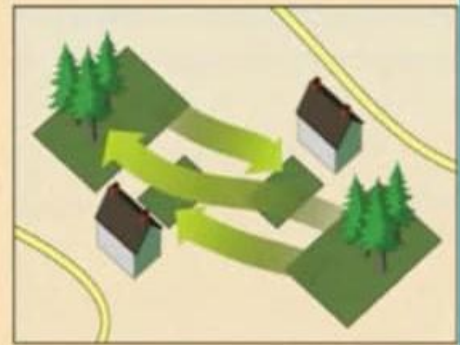
Pollinator Pathways Weave Habitat Back Together

These Pathways Are Not Just Gardens For
Pollinators - Pollinators Are An Indicator
Species - When They Successfully Return,
Other Life Can Follow
Learn More www.Pollinator-Pathway.org

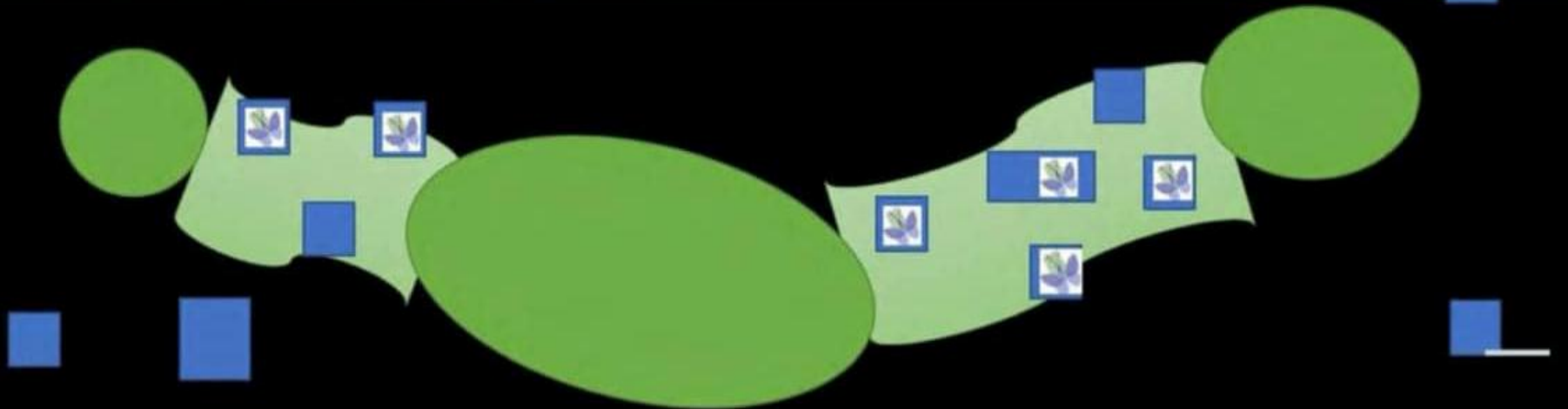


Scenario A: Fragmented Habitats

VS.



Scenario B: Connected Habitats



Look for signs of
the Pathway all
across the region!



Gardening in partnership with nature gives purpose to time outside, is great for health, improves mental health, and offers lots of teaching moments with kids!



Here's another
example of a
teaching
moment “host
plant” at work!
This is
Antennaria – the
common name
is Pussytoes.





**When they bloom,
they send up a stalk
about 1 foot tall
with a flower.**

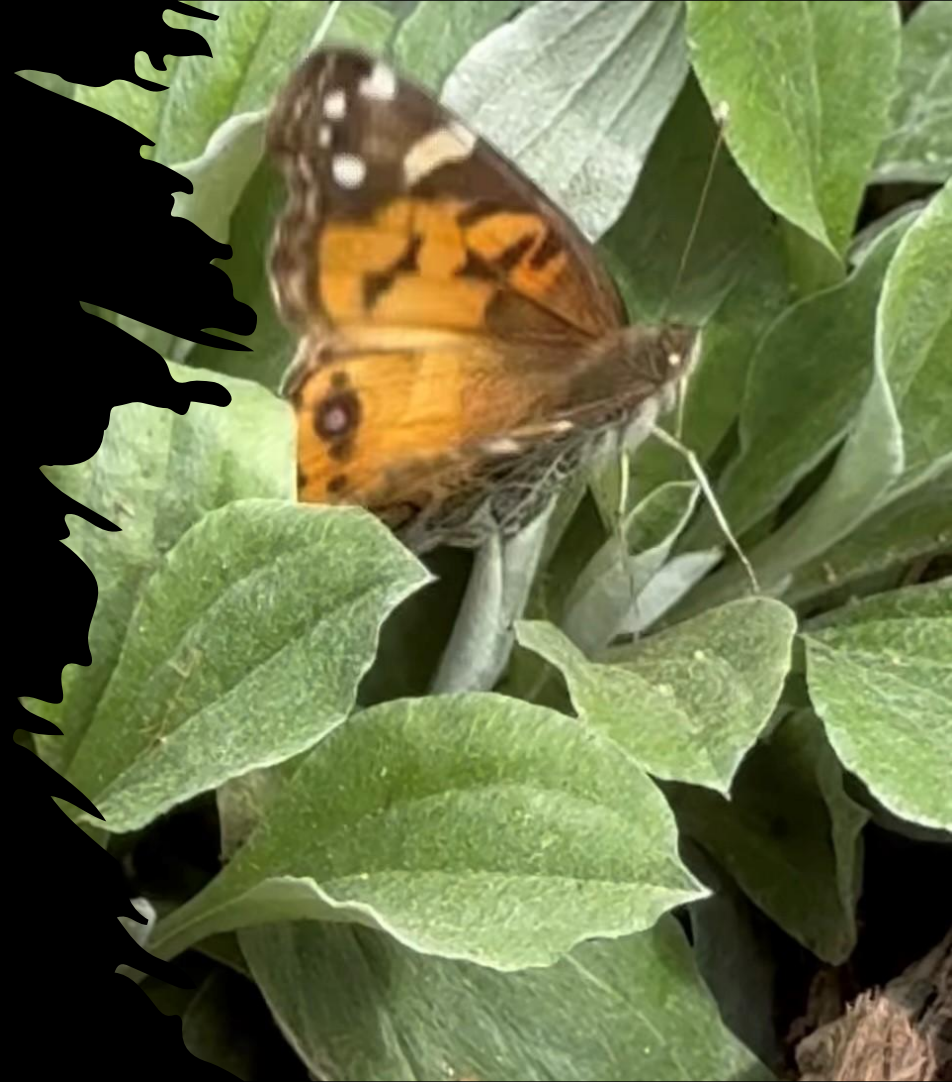
**This is a picture of
Pussytoes flower.**

**Can you guess how
it got its name?**



The flower on the pussytoes plant looks a lot like a cat paw! Kids love this plant! The foliage is also funny and the plant is child sized.

**This is an
American Lady
Butterfly laying
eggs on a
Pussytoes plant.**





**Each egg is
very tiny –
only the size
of a pencil
tip**

As the caterpillar gets bigger, it leaves its original home and builds a bigger shelter. It pulls several leaves together to create a bigger house.





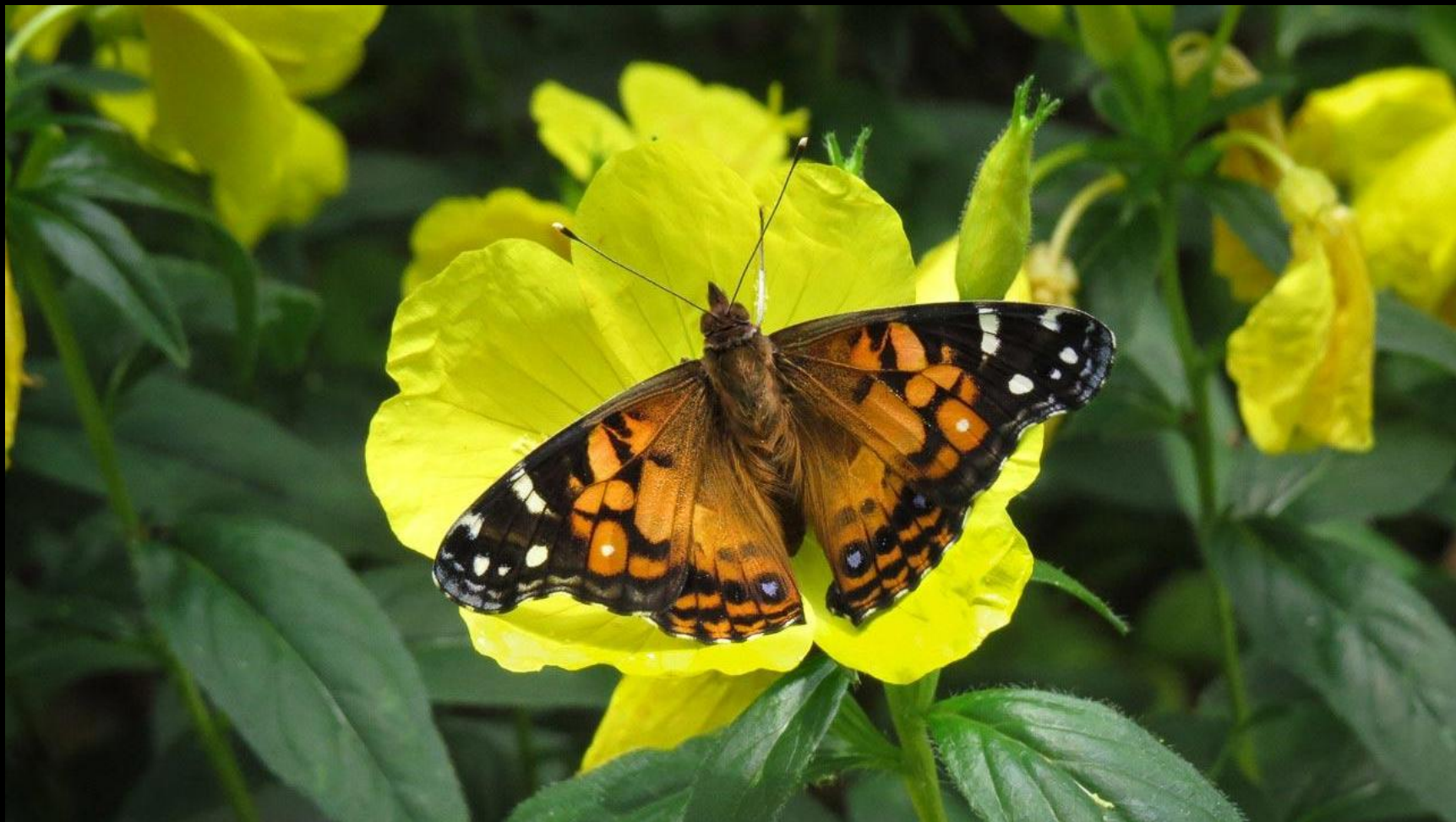
All the caterpillar houses make a mess of the leaves. But it doesn't hurt the plants.



When the caterpillar is ready to change into a butterfly, they fasten themselves to a branch and hang upside down. Then an amazing change occurs.



The caterpillar turns into a chrysalis which hangs from a twig or branch for ten days to two weeks and then finally... the caterpillar emerges as a butterfly.



The same process can be observed on *Anaphalis margaritacea* (Pearly Everlasting) - another New England Native Plant. These are actual plants on our sales shelf last June!



Just a few examples of fun and child friendly plants to include your buzzing Pollinator Garden!

Fun plants for pollinators

Mexican Sunflower

Spotted Bee Balm

Blueberry Bushes!!



Coral honeysuckle

Cardinal Flower

Borage

Nature friendly yards encourage bird watching right at home!

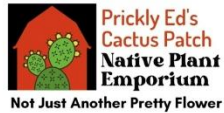
Backyard birdwatching offers children numerous benefits, fostering a love for nature, enhancing observational skills, and promoting mental and physical well-being. It can also teach patience, responsibility, and appreciation for the natural world.





There are lots of fun ways to engage with birds in your backyard! Just remember, birds need native plants to survive and thrive.

Reminder - be sure to use our website
www.PricklyEds.com to help you plan your
pollinator, wildlife, bird-friendly, nature centered
yard (that's good for kids too!)



**Pollinators, What's
all the Buzz About?**



Will you help us make our area a little bit wilder?

**Worried about the
planet? Change
starts in your
backyard...**



**Ready to build habitat for
our feathered friends?**

Use our checklist as your guide - download it
here >



**Native plants are for the birds!
Do your plantings include:**

- Keystone Native Plants that produce the caterpillars birds need like Oak, Cherry, Plum, Birch, Willow, Blueberry, Goldenrod, Wild Strawberry, and Shubby St. John's
- Nutritious berry producers like Dogwood, Viburnum, Winterberry, Elderberry, Black Gum, and Chokeberry?
- Plants with plentiful seed heads like, Clethra, Monarda, Aster, Joe Pye, Coneflower, Nodding Onion, and Native Grasses?
- Plants that offer nesting materials like Ferns and Milkweed.

**Does your design nurture
nature? Do you:**

- Have lots of native plants? Studies show that landscapes made up of at least 70% native plants best support birds? (Think about it as "2/3 for the birds!")
- Plant abundantly to mimic nature?
- Include shrubs and trees with varied heights for perching and plant in groupings to offer cover and safe places for nesting?
- Minimize light pollution by using amber bulbs, focusing light downward (never shine up into trees) and using timers & motion sensors?

**Is your yard maintained with
nature in mind? Do you:**

- Minimize areas of turf-grass lawn to make way for beneficial bird-friendly plantings?
- Keep fallen leaves on the property?
- Leave spent plant stems standing?
- Forgo pesticides (including herbicides, fungicides & lawn "weed & feed" products)?
- Safely leave dead trees (snags) & fallen logs?
- Use branches to create brush piles and dead hedges?
- Minimize noise pollution (like from oversized gas powered mowers and leaf blowers)?
- Avoid tree trimming during nesting season?

**Is your space "bird-centric"?
Do you:**

- Offer water sources that are changed and cleaned frequently?
- Provide high quality bird seed at times of year when resources are limited and clean feeders frequently?
- Protect birds from pets by keeping cats safely indoors and monitoring dogs very closely when outside?
- Use window decals to prevent bird strikes?
- Avoid the use of any outdoor decorations that could cause entanglement?
- Leave some wild corners to offer natural nesting and foraging opportunities?

Isn't "Inviting Nature Home" too Scary or Dangerous?

What about ticks, mosquitos, ants,
creepy crawly things, bird poop, snakes,
coyotes, squirrel bites, bee stings,
firefly burns, poisonous plants, lions and
tigers and bears oh my...

Best way to protect lawn from playground

DIY Question
Just installed a new playground for my kids in the backyard. What's the best way to protect the grass or minimize damage (if possible) from the structure? My grass is St Augustine located in North Texas



“...but our ability to accurately assess risk in the U.S. has gone haywire...”

Over 200,000 children go to emergency rooms each year for playground equipment falls – the main cause of injury is inadequate surfacing. Grass is not a safety surface.

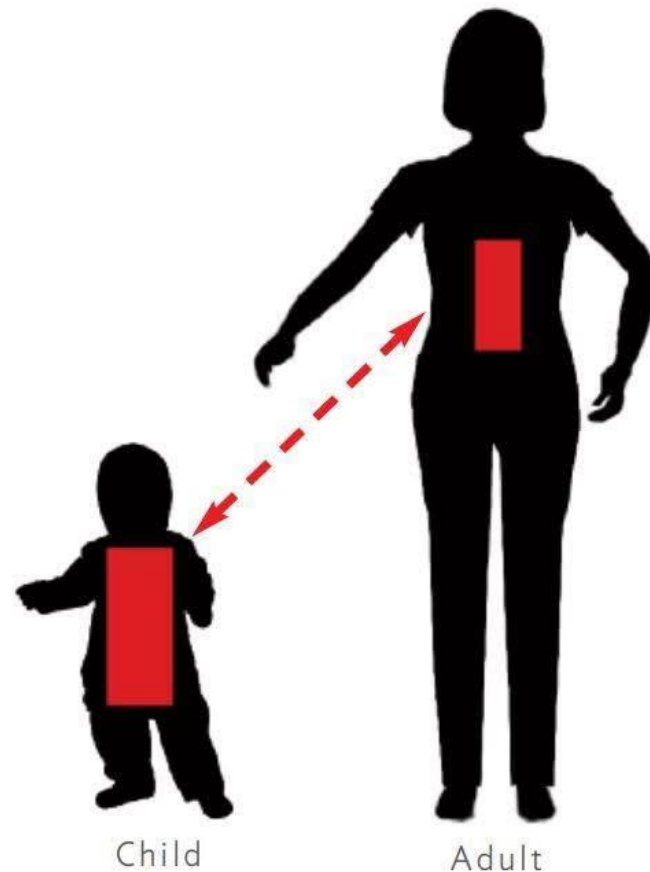
Americans love perfect lawns but they are NOT “green” or child, pet, or neighborhood friendly! What is the real cost of lawns?

- \$40 billion a year to maintain lawns
- 9 Billion Gallons of Water a Day
- 10x as many pesticides as commercial agriculture (80 million pounds a year)
- Stormwater runoff from treatments smother waterways & poison aquatic life
- 242 tons of pollutants generated by maintenance equipment
- 800 million gallons of gasoline each year to maintain lawns - as many as 17 million of which are spilled



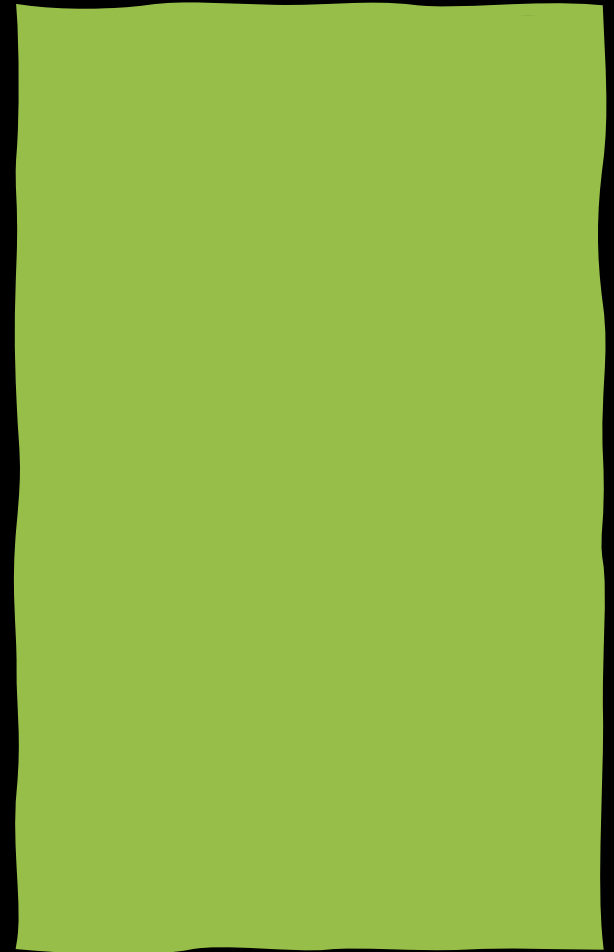
- Most conventional lawn care products contain “Agent Orange”
- Of 30 commonly used ingredients, 19 are linked to cancer, 13 to birth defects, 21 to reproductive disorders, 15 to brain damage
- Pesticides shown to increase risks of childhood cancer (especially leukemia and neuroblastoma) and contribute to rise of autism and ADHD (*children are uniquely sensitive to toxins in the environment - it is recommended to keep them off treated lawns for weeks after application*)
- Lawn chemicals are routinely found at high levels in the urine of dogs - there are immediate ingestion/toxicity concerns and long-term increase in risk of cancers
- Lawn treatments are HIGHLY toxic to bees and other pollinators and 70 million wild birds are killed annually through ingestion of these toxic products

Americans use
10x the amount
of pesticides in
home
landscapes as
are used in
commercial
agriculture!



If a pesticide is present in air, food or water, a greater amount will be taken in by a child in proportion to their body size or weight than by an adult.

Are the Creepy,
Crawly Things
Really Creepy?
Let's Play a
Game...



**How Would
You Feel
About
Finding This
Bug In Your
Yard?**



**How About
This One?**





Deposit eggs
on leaves



1. Eggs stage

LIFE CYCLE OF LADY BUG



4. Adult stage



2. Larvae stage



3. Pupa stage



Let's Try Again! Are any of these dangerous for children to be around?





Okay – just one more!

DANGER????



But...What About Bee Stings?!



Ticks and mosquitos – know the facts.

According to the science (not the marketing), we quote “Before deciding to spray your yard, know the facts. Spraying can harm you, your kids, pets and your neighbors. The chemicals can also harm birds and insects that help eat mosquitos and pollinate your yard.” Real experts agree, mosquito treatments, including the alleged “all natural” variety can harm you and your environment, while not actually reducing mosquito populations.

What really helps for mosquitos?

- Remove or regularly change out any sources of standing water
- Use mosquito dunks
- Wear long sleeves and use non-toxic personal repellents
- Attract mosquito eating friends (hummingbirds and dragonflies eat hundreds of mosquitoes every day!)



What really helps for ticks?

- Create wide pathways to move through your space
- Wear light colored clothing and close toe shoes - tuck pants into socks and use personal repellents
- Children with indoor-outdoor pets are 3x as likely to contract Lyme disease -take precautions
- Do daily tick checks – ticks need to be attached > 24 hours to transmit Lyme disease – this is a serious disease – BUT – less than 3% of bites result in disease

Finally, on the Topic of Poisonous Plants...

Your child is not a goat! Do they really go around chewing on plants?



Did you know? Many of the most commonly used landscape plants in our area are on “poisonous for children” plant lists, including:

- Daffodils
- Hydrangeas
- Azaleas
- Lily of the Valley
- English Ivy
- Boxwood
- Burning Bush
- Privet

Not So Fun Facts – Every Year:

- 3.5 million children injured annually in organized sports – 20 die each year from football injuries
- 200,000 children each year to go the ER for a playground injury
- 160,000 children are injured each year in car accidents – 3 children die each day in vehicle related accidents
- There are around 200 fatalities from animal encounters each year – the majority are domestic dogs and farm animals
- 70 children die each year from hotdogs
- There are 75,000 alcohol related deaths each year
- Lightening kills 50 people each year, and another
- 300 people are killed by toasters

So let's not let fear of danger get in the way of creating the kinds of spaces kids need to thrive – and the planet needs to survive!



Your kids can experience beneficial outdoor time in nature right in your own backyard!

<https://blogs.nwf.org/-/media/PDFs/Butterfly-Heroes/BH-Nature-Guide.pdf>



Nature Play at Home

A Guide for Boosting Your Children's
Healthy Development and Creativity

Written by Sarah Konradi, Julie Murphy, Robin Moore & Nilda Cosco



Natural settings that previous generations took for granted now must be deliberately created. In doing so here are some essential guidelines to keep in mind.

Make a Plan!



Conceptual Play Area Plan

studio
MLA
ARCHITECTS

Woonsocket: Head Start
Woonsocket, RI
14 June 2012
Revised 3 July 2012



Be sure to ask the right questions as you think about planning your outdoor space!

Instead of asking “what kind of equipment should I buy”, ask things like:

- **What kind of life** do we want to support and inspire in this space?
 - **What kind of childhood** does the space allow for?
 - How will this space help my child **learn**?
 - How does this space help my child to **reconnect to nature**?
 - How does this space support my child's **health and wellbeing**?
- How does this space help create a **better tomorrow**?
- How does this space **connect** with my broader community?

Determine Your Risk Continuum



Determine Your Tolerance of Exploration and Mess

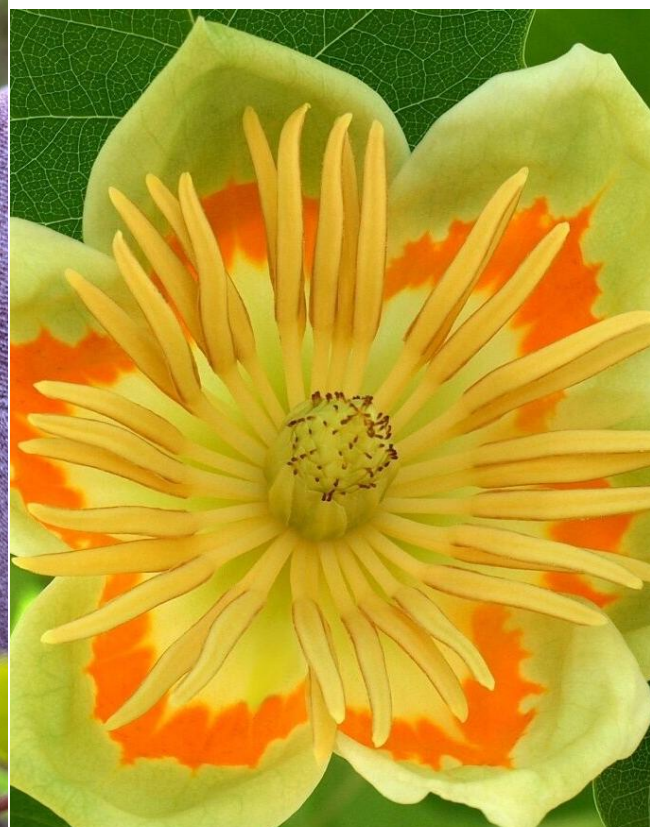
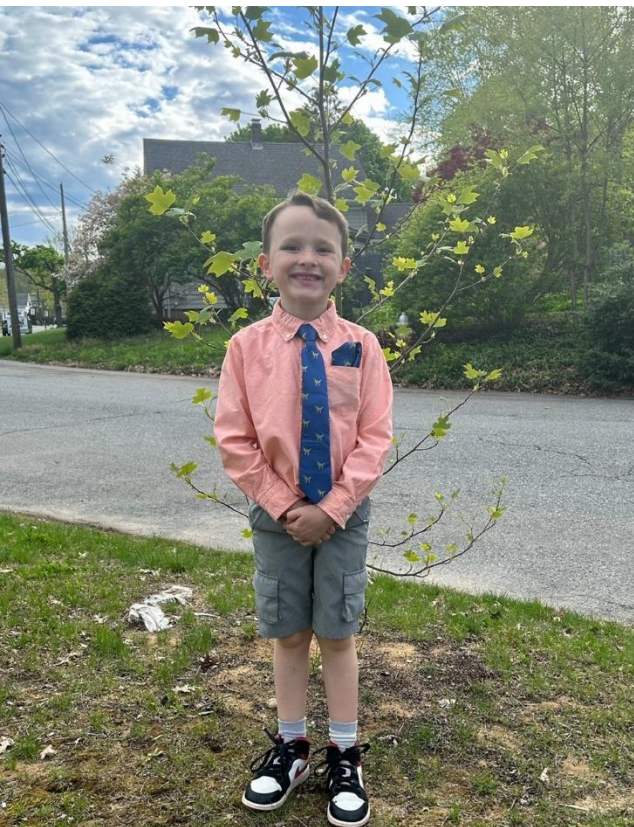


Conduct a “Site Assessment”

Look For – Ask:

- How do we enter the space?
- How are the boundaries defined?
- What is the light?
- What is the soil like?
- What existing vegetation should stay? What should go? What should be added and where?
- Where are the fixed features? How can we use them or how do we need to avoid them?
- What are the views? How do we use them in the design?
- Are there true hazards to mitigate?
- Where does rain go when it falls?
- What windows overlook the space? How can I best supervise without surveilling?

Shade is very important for children's play. If your yard doesn't have enough shade right now consider planting trees. Trees are cool!



Tulip Poplar Tree is just one example of a very fast growing native tree that kids love. It grows very, very tall! Right now, the tree is just a little bit taller than James but soon it will grow taller than the roof! It has beautiful flowers in the springtime that pollinators love to visit.

Shade trees are an investment in the future. Select native varieties well-adapted to our area including Oak, Maple, Birch, and Tupelo.



Design for children – not for adults!



Excerpt Reprinted from the Vancouver Sun

Author: Frances Hill, Mary

Publication Date: 14 Dec 2010

That play spaces should be designed for children, not adults, might seem obvious. But a five-year study tracking the habits of toddlers and preschoolers in playgrounds across Vancouver suggests an obsession with safety has forced kids into safe but sterile and uninspiring outdoor spaces that might satisfy adult anxieties and needs, but shortchange children's development.

Instead of traditional swings and slides, the kids want places where they can hide, play with dirt and be creative.

Susan Herrington, a professor in the University of B.C.'s School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, who led the study, said modern, trendy-looking playspaces may be safe and the equipment is sturdy, but they leave nothing for childish imaginations. Between 2003 and 2008, she and her researchers studied 16 outdoor play centres, videotaping children aged two to five. They found that 87 per cent of the time the conventional equipment - monkey bars, swings, slides and climbing structures - remained empty. Even when the children played on or around the equipment, they used it for its intended purpose, like going down the slide, only three per cent of the time, according to the study.

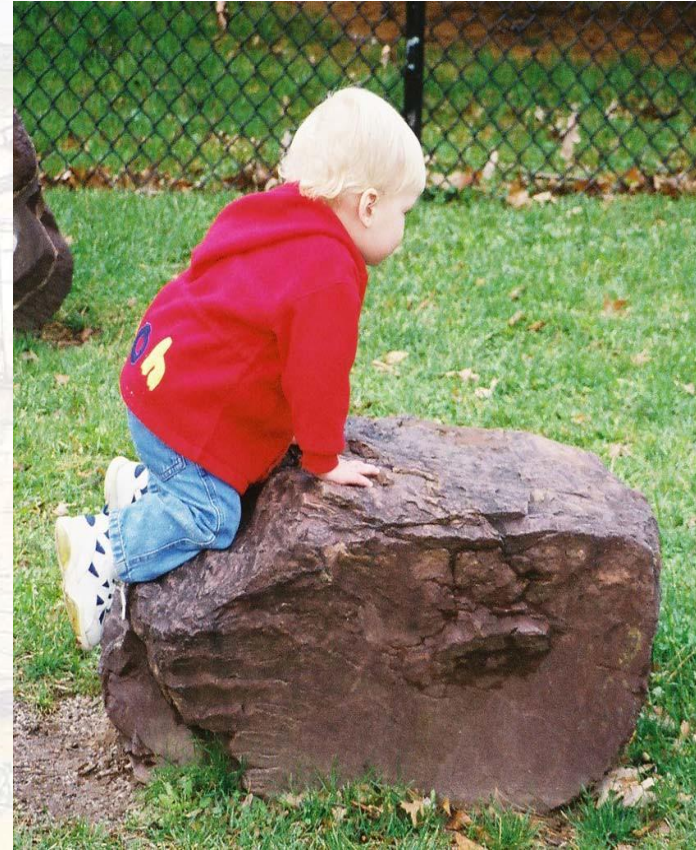
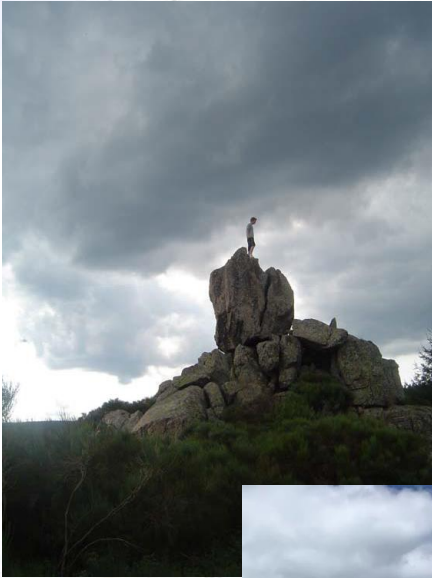


\$100,000

\$100,000

Some key principles to
keep in mind when
planning your outdoor
play spaces.

Experience is scalable!



Consider your space from a child's point of view (literally)



Build Healthy Places for Children to Be



Gross motor skills are physical activities and large movements that promote the use and development of the large muscle groups of a body. Structures take a lot of space and tend to focus on just a couple of skills. Natural spaces with varied, open-ended activities can help build a variety of gross motor skills.

- **Balancing**
- **Climbing**
- **Lifting**
- **Pulling and Pushing**
- **Stretching**
- **Bending**
- **Kicking and Tossing**
- **Steering and pedaling**
- **Hanging by arms**
- **Running and skipping**
- **Swinging**
- **Jumping**
- **Hopping**
- **Hula hooping**
- **Tossing (aiming)**
- **Throwing and Catching**
- **Kicking**



Create for ALL of the senses!

THE FIVE SENSES



SIGHT: I see with my eyes.



HEARING: I hear with my ears.



TASTE: I taste with my tongue.



SMELL: I smell with my nose.



TOUCH: I touch with my hand.



To enhance children's visual experience, choose plants with vibrant colors, varied textures, and showy flowers or foliage. When planning your space select a variety of plants that will bloom from spring through fall. This is also what is best for pollinators.

Native Plants for Seeing

Rose Mallow



Turtlehead Ironweed Cutleaf Coneflower



Blue-eyed
Grass



Fringe Tree



Sumac



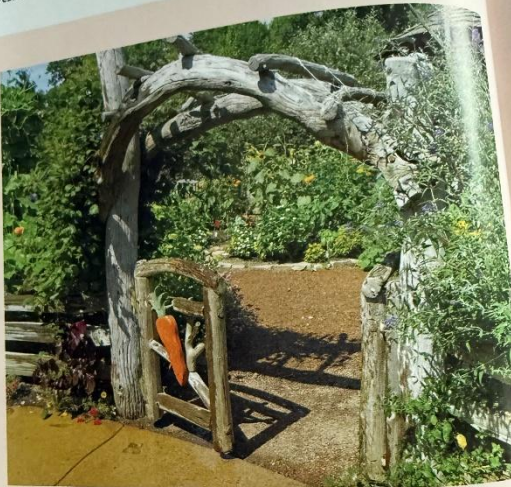
Red Twig Dogwood Beautyberry



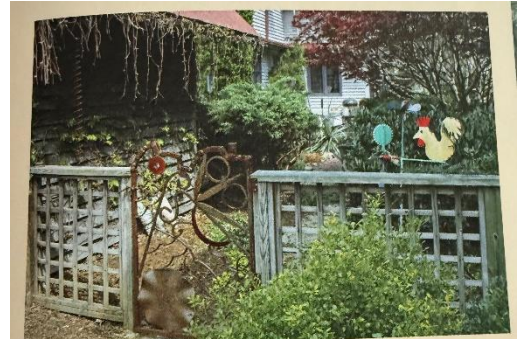
Visual Surprises



Entries that visually beckon!



At the Hershey Children's Garden in the Cleveland Botanical Garden, this whimsical arch and gate tell kids that this is a space just for them.



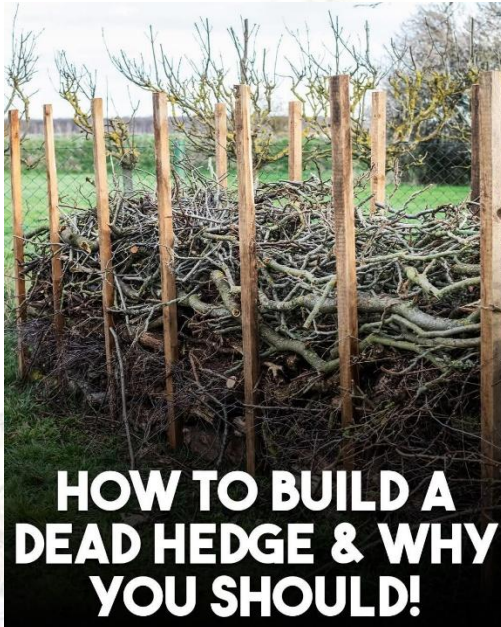
A welcoming garden entry with a hand-hewn metal gate.



This rustic arbor draws children down the path and into an outdoor classroom.



Enclosures that offer enhanced nature benefits and sensory experiences!



Select some plants that will add interesting and soothing sounds to a space. Grasses are especially effective for this. Many native plants create fun seed pods that can be shaken and popped.

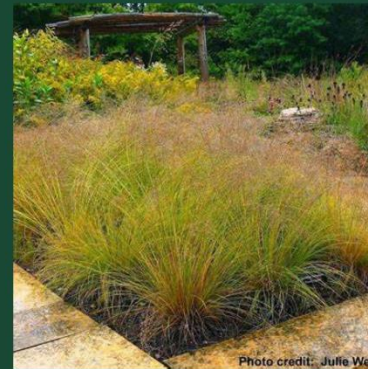
Native Plants for Hearing

Rustling Grass

River Oats



Prairie Dropseed



Switchgrass



Baptisia



Columbine



Redbud



Rattling Seed Pods

An important benefit children derive from nature comes from soothing and repetitive sounds like bird calls and spring peepers. Equipment drowns out these quieter, nature-centered sounds. Excessive noise is also very bad for children and can lead to early stress and anxiety. Cumulative exposure leads to early hearing loss, raises blood pressure even in children, impacts learning, and disrupts sleep.



Add features that bring whimsical sounds to a space.



When you garden with native plants there is no need for chemical fertilizers that obscure natural plant fragrances. Many pollinators are very attracted to strongly scented plants!

Native Plants for Smelling

Mountain Mint



Wild Bergamot



Phlox



Hay Scented Fern



Anise Scented
Goldenrod



Sweet Fern



Summersweet



Fothergilla



Sweet Bay Magnolia





You can enhance several sensory experiences (sight, scent, and even taste) with the addition of an herb spiral garden! This is a great DIY project to build with kids.

Tactile learning is extremely important for children, in fact it is central to the way children come to understand the world in early years. Provide opportunities for children to interact with plants, interesting tree barks are an especially effective way to connect touch to the garden.

Native Plants for Touching

Bark

River Birch



Persimmon



Native Dogwood



Foliage

Amonsia



Columbine



Purple Lovegrass



Pathways are an essential component of nature-based play spaces. They delineate one space from another, draw children through the space, allow children to move safely through the space and when planned creatively provide a number of tactile experiences.





River rock and pavers set in a concrete path designed for barefoot walking create a unique tactile experience.

Uneven pavers and the use of varied materials creates a more interesting sensory experience. Walking on uneven surfaces also helps to develop a better sense of balance, critical to reducing falls later in life.



An arrangement of irregular pavers incorporates tree roots into the path, protecting the tree, celebrating and exposing its root system, and making the path more interesting.



Soft grasses, meandering curves and undulations, and a mix of pavers engage multiple senses.

Places to Grow – A great complement to your nature centered space is a vegetable garden that children can help plant, tend and eat!

Did you know, 93% of children do not eat enough vegetables? Children are more than twice as likely to eat five portions of veggies a day when they are homegrown and far more likely to eat a wide variety.



All great nature-centered playspaces are well stocked with “Loose Parts”



This is not a stick...

It's a wand
It's a guitar
It's a shovel
It's a horse
It's a baton
It's a telescope
It's a sword
It's a microphone
It's a ski pole
It's a spoon
It's a fishing pole
It's a treasure finder
It's a paddle.

and anything else a child can imagine!



A FEW examples of loose parts

MANUFACTURED

- Boards and lumber
- Crates, buckets, bins
- Boxes (giant and small)
- Old clothing, fabric
- Heavy items that need two to lift
- Pots, pans and utensils
- Wagons, bikes, wheelbarrels
- Balls, jump ropes, hula hoops

NATURAL

- Driftwood and shells
- Rocks
- Tree “cookies” (slices of logs)
- Gnarly logs and burls
- Leaves
- Old Christmas Trees
- Plants and flowers
- Straw bales



Think of it as the cat and box syndrome. You can buy them all the toys you want, but they go for the empty box they came in every time!



All great nature-centered playspaces contain forms of water – and sand



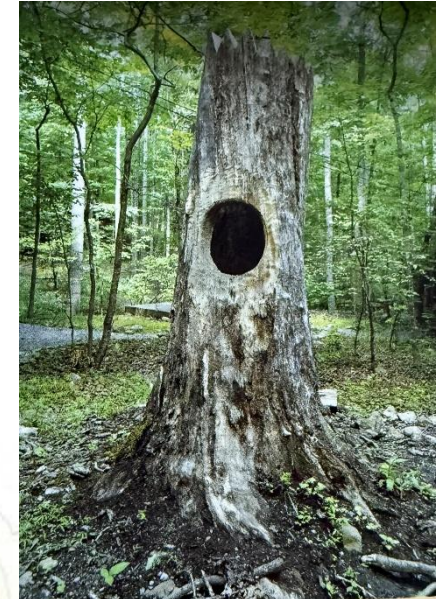
**And what happens when you put
sand and water together?!**



All great nature-centered playspaces give children the freedom to create their own play experiences!



When you leave organic materials onsite it provides for nature – and it provides amazing experiences for kids!



And that brings
us back to
where we
started. What's
good for nature
is good for kids!
Create outdoor
spaces that
nurture both
and secure a
better future for
your children.

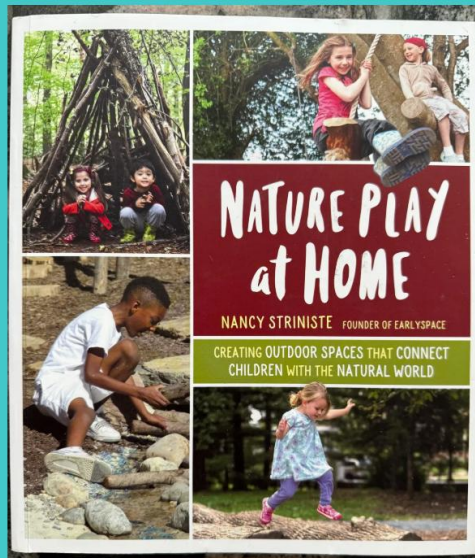


RESOURCES

Be sure to visit and bookmark the “Landscaping for Kids” Page of our website www.PricklyEds.com where you will find a growing group of resources and information to help you plan your space. A PDF of the slides shown this evening is also available on that page for your convenience.



[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [CONTACT INFO, HOURS, ETC.](#) [PLANT SHOPPING DETAILS](#) [MORE](#) | [🔍](#)



Gardening With Kids - Gardening for Kids

The experiences that most of us naturally enjoyed as children now need to be intentionally recreated for today's youngest generation. When we invite nature home, we create spaces that are great for children's health, development, and well-being. And these spaces are just what nature needs too! Explore resources below.

EXPLORE MORE AT THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION'S
NATURE PLAY SPACES SITE